

Should a college coach be the highest paid state employee in Connecticut?

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Ken Krayeske in all likelihood will be a forgotten man by the time college basketball's March Madness rolls around in a few weeks. But Krayeske should have opened up a legitimate debate about the salaries that state colleges give to head football and head basketball coaches at big time football and basketball playing schools. At the news conference following Saturday's University of Connecticut-South Florida game in Hartford, Krayeske asked a fair question. He wanted to know if Calhoun would return a part of his \$1.6 annual million salary to help the state of Connecticut, as the state legislature deals with a significant budget deficit of about a billion dollars that could result in firing of state employees.

Calhoun was also asked about his other contracts that include a TV deal and a sneaker company agreement, and answered Krayeske with the claim that the basketball team brings the school \$12 million annually. That may be true but college sports programs are generally considered money losers. Some schools do get libraries or labs with some monies generated by sports teams but big time college sports is a very expensive proposition. Schools offer multiple sports beyond football and basketball.

The exchange between Krayeske and Calhoun was highly unusual. Post game news conferences are boring affairs unless someone brings up a point to a losing coach who doesn't like the question, wants to embarrass the questioner, or just wants to make a dramatic point. Then, that coach goes ballistic and starts yelling at the media. Reporters think nothing of being abused by coaches or players because it is all part of the game. The reporters take one for the team or the sport.

Krayeske should have made journalists, elected officials and people think.

Why is Calhoun, who is a basketball coach, paid more than Governor Jodi Rell? The governor has the responsibility of the welfare of the entire population of the state. Calhoun recruits players, runs practices and sends players onto a court to play a game. Calhoun isn't the only basketball or football coach among the highest paid state employees in the US. Two of Calhoun's colleagues at the University of Connecticut are also well compensated. Football coach Randy Edsall and women's basketball coach Geno Auriemma will each earn between an estimated \$1.5 and \$1.6 million.

The entire college sports business is all about money. Schools, whether they are public or private, have been in an arms race to satisfy coach's money demands. Schools find an identity through sports. But once a school decides to go "big time" that school also becomes a professional organization except in one area. They get away without paying players and those players should be happy with the possibility of getting a fully paid education in exchange for their sweat, blood and tears.

The coach makes his or her money off their unpaid players' backs. The coach gets a TV deal off unpaid players' backs. The coach gets a sneaker endorsement contract off unpaid players' backs.

Calhoun was angry with Krayeske, who, by the way, has been dismissed as a political activist and freelance reporter, and told Krayeske to get his facts right.

But the facts in Connecticut include the possibility of cutbacks among the number of workers in police and fire departments, in public education, or hiking public colleges bills. No use sugar coating it in Connecticut, the state is a billion dollars in the hole and while the economic stimulus will send money into Connecticut, New Haven is still looking for about \$10 million in givebacks from its public employees.

It's time to stop pretending that Division I college football and basketball are some sort of amateur or scholastic endeavor for students. Colleges and universities are supposed to be places where students matriculate and get ready for the real world. For Division I schools, though, the real world is filling stadiums and arenas with well- heeled boosters, signing deals with corporations for stadium-naming rights, getting money from shoe companies for outfitting their teams and putting the best product available on the field or court to justify the multi-million-dollar broadcasting contracts for their games.

Putting the best product available on the field or court means that spending millions for the best coach or coaches and in Connecticut, three of the highest state employees are two basketball coaches and a football coach.

The Calhoun-Krayeske confrontation comes at a time when President Barack Obama and Congress along with others in Washington are trying to find a solution to fix the economy. California almost went broke before a state budget deal was brokered. Kansas is in serious financial trouble. In New York Governor David Patterson is threatening to cut state jobs. Job cuts and unpaid furloughs are on the table as ways to close budget deficits yet no one is suggesting that a state employee like Rutgers' football Greg Schiano of New Jersey will see a pay cut. It seems out of whack that state employees like football and basketball coaches are getting raises and bonuses while classes at Rutgers have been cut and tuition along with student fees are being hiked for the average student, a good many of whom have to borrow money to pay for their educations.

Krayeske threw a curve ball at a news conference, and while it was reported, it has not gone any further and probably will not resonate with the public. There should be a thorough discussion of big time college sports and how states are paying millions in tough economic times for coaches. Don't expect CBS on any of its broadcast platforms to bring up the Krayeske-Calhoun exchange, it would not be good for Sumner Redstone and his faltering CBS business or its partner, the NCAA, or Calhoun. Silence in this case is golden.